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★ formerly SPORTS WINNERS ★

Volume 9

October, 1956

Number 1

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"Popping off is the sucker's way, Hawley. It'll take a long time for people to forget about being called morons—maybe never!"

POPULAR GUY

by JACK RITCHIE

CHAD HAWLEY looked into the locker room mirror and adjusted the knot of his tie. He noticed the angry red on his cheekbones and clamped his mouth tight on the words that were forming. "McGuire."

McGuire of the *Journal*, leaned against the wall and watched him. "So you came in fourth in the poll. Considering that there are seven other regular second basemen in the league, you didn't do so bad, did you Chad?"

Sprague, the florid-faced manager of the Falcons, came over. "Lay off him, McGuire."

"All I'm doing is talking," McGuire said. "How about it, Chad? Can I get some quotes on what you think of the All-Star Poll?"

The locker room was quiet as the rest of the Falcons waited expectantly.

"He thinks they're great," Sprague said. "A true expression of democracy. He thinks that O'Brien deserved the honor and he's happy for him."

"That right, Chad?" McGuire asked, grinning.

"You heard him," Chad said.

"Let's see," McGuire said, making a big process of racking his memory for the statistics. "You led the league in fielding your position for three straight years. And in the last two of them your batting average topped .290. O'Brien never did more than .275, and that was six years ago."



Chad Hawley put on his sport jacket and buttoned it. He could feel the blood hot in his veins.

Sprague put a hand on his shoulder. "Take it easy, kid."

"Sure," McGuire said. "Run some cold water over your wrists. How about a word of thanks to the fans who did vote for you? Something to the effect that you appreciate their support."

"Why the hell should I?" Hawley snapped.

Sprague pushed him toward the door. "Better take off now, Chad."

McGuire followed them. "Or a few words about the fans who didn't vote for you. Especially the hometown ones? Or something about how it feels to be a loner on the team, with even your teammates not particularly thrilled by your personality?"

Chad stopped at the door and turned. "All right; you're needling for a blow-off, and here it is." He shrugged aside Sprague's hand. "If the fans who come to this park had to pass an intelligence test to get in, the stands would be empty; they don't know baseball from a Bull Durham sign. Even in his good days, O'Brien was nothing to rave about. But he's a holler guy, on the field and off; and if there's anything that impresses the morons who come to a ball park, it's a lot of wind and noise."

Chad's teammates were silently busy

and they avoided his eyes. He looked them over. "What the rest of the team thinks of me doesn't make me lose sleep. I'm in this game because it pays me good money and for no other reason; if that bothers them, I'm not going to cry about it."

Sprague sat down on a bench and sighed. "You satisfied now, McGuire?"

CHAD LEFT through the player's exit and passed a mob of kids shoving slips of paper at Morris, the Falcon's slugging right fielder. The boys glanced at him disinterestedly and continued to shove for autographs.

Chad got into the player's bus and took a seat in the rear. In fifteen minutes the bus filled and Charley Alpin, the Falcon first sacker, took the only remaining seat next to Chad.

Alpin smiled thinly as he noticed Chad stiffen. "Relax," he said. "I got nothing to say." But after a few moments he spoke. "Popping off is the sucker's way. It'll take a long while for people to forget about being called morons—maybe never."

Chad turned on him. "I thought you had nothing to say?"

After breakfast the next morning, Chad went to the hotel newsstand and bought himself a paper. He turned to the sports pages and read about himself. "Chad Hawley Bitter at Poll Results. Calls Fans Morons. O'Brien Loudmouth."

The afternoon game was the rubber of a three game series with the visiting fourth place Bruins. The Falcons, in first by two and a half, had tucked away the first game in a walk-away 8 to 2, and dropped the second, 3 to 1.

The fans started on Chad as soon as he stepped onto the field for the pre-game practice and they didn't let up. Chad kept his eyes from the stands and ignored the catcalls.

The Bruins went down in order in the top half and the Falcons trotted in. Heald, the shortstop and lead-off man,

fouled off a couple and then managed to sweat out a free trip to first.

When Chad stepped into the batter's box, he thought he was ready for the reception the fans would give him; but the chorus of boos and foot stamping brought a flush to his cheeks.

He squared off for the expected bunt on the first pitch and rapped it too hard. The Bruin third sacker, halfway to the plate, gloved the pop-up and rifled to first to double up Heald.

Hawley shouldered his way through the derisive shouts of the paying customers and stepped down into the dugout. Pomfret fled out to center to end the inning.

IN THE second, the first Bruin batter poked one down the right field line to the corner, and by the time the relay came in, he had a stand-up triple.

The next Bruin batter tried too hard for the long sacrifice fly and went down swinging.

Hagg, the Falcon pitcher, missed the corner on a three-two count and Neyhardt, the Bruin third baseman, trotted down to first.

With men on first and third and one out, Hagg kept the pitches low to Bowman, a weak hitter, hoping for the double play rap. Bowman cooperated by stroking one toward second.

Chad Hawley scooped it up, stepped on second, and poured the ball to Alpin on first. The throw was wide. Alpin managed to tip it with his glove, but it got by and rolled into the visitor's dugout. The unearned run scored from third and Bowman scurried to second.

There was a long groan of pain from the fans at Chad's error. He turned his back on them and studied the scoreboard until Hagg was ready to pitch again. The next Bruin was retired without any more damage.

The pitching kept tight and the score held at 1 to 0. Chad struck out twice with men in scoring position; in the last of the seventh he grounded out, third to first.

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The Falcons started the last of the ninth the right way when Kirkwood, the catcher, singled to left. Avril, batting for Hagg, pushed him to second on a sacrifice. The Bruin center fielder made a shoe string catch of Heald's liner, and Kirkwood had to hustle back to second.

When Chad Hawley came up for his turn the fans groaned, and some of them set up a chant for a pinch-hitter.

Chad pounded the dirt out of his spikes and dug in. The first pitch was a chin-high duster and Hawley sat down hard and fast to get out of the way. He heard the roar of laughter from the crowd.

Chad fingered the rosin sack and stepped back in, his lips set in a tight line.

The Bruin hurler made the mistake of serving up a fat one, shoulder high. Chad's wrists snapped as he laced into the pitch.

The left fielder saw what was coming and turned his back as he raced for the wall. After eight or nine steps, he looked over his shoulder and slowed down to a stop. He stood with his hands on his hips as he watched the ball clear the fence, fair by about ten feet.

Sprague was there between home and third to pat his shoulder as Chad trotted in with the winning run, but he was the only one.

There was a strange silence from the fans. They wanted their Falcons to win, but they didn't want Hawley to be the one to do it for them. A murmur finally broke the silence. There were no boos for Chad, but neither was there any applause.

WHEN CHAD was through showering, Sprague met him with a telegram in his hand. "The Commissioner wants to see you," he said.

Hawley slipped into his shirt. "He's six hundred miles away; I'd miss a couple of games."

"You'd miss them even if you don't go; you're suspended." Sprague studied

Chad's expressionless face. "It's not my doing. I know you were needled into this. But the Commissioner would like to know the facts firsthand."

Chad shrugged. "If he wants talk, I'll give him some."

"You got a good record, Chad. You never shot off your mouth before. All that's likely to happen is that you get to stand in front of a loudspeaker and make an apology to the fans."

"Would you like to bet?"

Sprague's eyes met Chad's. "On your train ride, take time to think things over. If you're stubborn about this, it may finish you in baseball."

When Chad Hawley reported to the Commissioner's offices, he was met in the anteroom by a dozen newspapermen. They crowded around him.

"I understand Ted Williams is getting jealous because you irritate the fans more than he does. You got anything to say about that?" one of them asked, grinning.

A spectacled reporter edged his voice in. "Is it true that you wear the largest size cap in the major leagues?"

Commissioner Walker came out of the inner offices and shouldered his way to Hawley's side. "We'll issue a statement later," he said. "Now be good scribblers and clear the way."

The newsmen pressed for words from Chad, but he kept his mouth shut as he preceded Walker into his office and the door closed behind them.

"Take a chair," Walker said. He took a cigar out of a humidor and lit it. Walker was a big heavy man with graying hair and a touch of humor in his eyes. He sat down and his eyes went over Hawley. "I suppose you were misquoted?"

"Not enough for it to make much difference."

"Well, good; at least we got that settled. You don't know how refreshing it is to hear somebody admit something like that." Walker opened the manila

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folder on his desk and leafed through a few of the loose sheets. "Would you care to explain your reasons for saying what you did?"

"It's what I thought and still think."

Walker nodded absently and kept his eyes on the papers. "Did you think the same things before the results of the All-Star Poll came out?"

Chad flushed and said nothing.

WALKER closed the folder and looked up. "Maybe you think you're the best second baseman in the league, and maybe you're right; but All-Stars get picked for a lot of reasons. Some because they play for big city teams, and big cities can rout out more votes for their players than small cities can. Some because they make a lot of noise and get noticed. And some because of what they have contributed to the game."

The Commissioner glanced down at the papers for a moment before he continued. "Nowadays they have figures on everything in the game. I wouldn't be surprised if they count the hangnails a first baseman gets in the course of a season. But even with all the statisticians cluttering up the place, there are some things they'll never get down on paper."

Walker tapped off some cigar ash. "Things like what one RBI means when it wins a game, and how little three or four of them mean when your team is ahead 8 to 0. Things like how you get along with the rest of the team. Things like trying hard, even if it means bruising your delicate skin."

Walker's eyes met Chad's. "Am I making myself clear?"

"I heard you," Chad said. "In other words I got to learn to smile, and be a good fellow, and die for the dear old Falcons. If I do that I might win a popularity contest too."

Walker looked out of the window for a while. "You're going to have to make a public apology, you know."

"I'll think about it."

Ice came into Walker's voice. "Do

that; you're on vacation until you make up your mind." He shifted in his chair and dismissed Chad by picking up a newspaper. "If you don't want to meet the reporters, you can go out the back way. Or maybe you've got something more to say to them?"

Chad Hawley got up and took the back way out.

The Senior Leagers won the All-Star game the next afternoon and O'Brien did his bit with fancy fielding. He had three for five at the plate and drove in two runs.

When Chad reported back to the Falcons, Sprague took him aside. "I hate to say it, Chad, but you'd better make up your mind about that apology pretty soon. I can't have you sitting out a dozen games while you're being stubborn; you know we're weak in utility men. I'm trying out this kid Michalak in your position, but I have my doubts. I may have to call up Runyon from Triple A; that will mean I have to make room for him. I hope you get the hint."

The second place Lions came into town riding a five game winning streak. At game time, Chad came into the dugout wearing civvies and took a seat beside Sprague.

"Technically, I don't suppose I should be allowed to sit here while I'm suspended. Want to kick me out?"

"Not particularly," Sprague said. He looked out on the field. "I'm worried about Michalak. He'll be good some day, but he's green now."

THERE WASN'T any scoring in the first half for the Lions, and during the home try Michalak swung at two bad pitches and then watched a third good one go by. He came back into the dugout and avoided Sprague's eyes.

Chad looked at his hands for a while and then he cleared his throat. "Don't let it get you, kid. The first day I put on a big league uniform, I struck out three times out of four trips."

Sprague waited until the top of the second when the team was on the field

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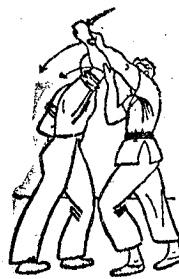
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before he turned to Chad. "If I remember right, you got four for four that day."

"I keep forgetting," Hawley said.

As he watched the men on the diamond, a strange feeling came to the pit of his stomach. He'd always been more or less a loner, but this was different. Here he was sitting on the bench, a complete outsider. It gave him a feeling of more complete loneliness than he had ever experienced before.

Michalak had no business come his way until the third. Then he made a beautiful backhanded stop of a hard smash. He whirled and fired to Alpin at first. Alpin made a desperate leap, but the ball was over his glove and the runner went to second before he could run down the ball.

Reinhold, who was on the mound for the Falcons, let the poor support rattle

him and made the next pitch too good. Toliver, the Lion's left fielder, met the pitch with the fat of his bat and poled it 390 feet into the bleachers, making the score 2 to 0.

Reinhold settled down after that and retired the side.

When Michalak returned to the dug-out, he sat with his eyes studying the cement floor between his knees. "Nice stop," Chad said.

Michalak glanced at him. "What have you got to say about the throw?"

"I've made plenty of them, too; don't let the crowd make you nervous."

"I don't," Michalak said. "I know they're just people. They make mistakes, too."

Chad looked startled for a moment and he eyed the stands as though trying to confirm the statement.

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In the fourth, Michalak made another nice stop and this time made the throw to first good. He got a round of applause for the play.

Chad remembered the applause he used to get. Nothing sensational like that which followed when Morris blasted out another four bagger, but good substantial applause to show that the fans appreciated a particularly good play.

He remembered, too, the boos he had received the last time he'd appeared on the field. Chad kicked at the steps of the dugout.

The Lions added to their lead in the fifth and sixth and the Falcons never caught up. The final score was five to three. Michalak handled two more chances without a miscue and got a scratch single in the eighth.

The visitors repeated the next day with a 5 to 0 whitewash and narrowed the Falcon lead to one half game. Michalak handled himself flawlessly in the field, but he failed to do anything at the plate.

CHAD WAS sitting alone in the lobby of the hotel when Sprague lowered himself into the easy chair beside him. "We got just this game tomorrow night," he said, "and then the road-trip. Tonight's your last chance to apologize to the home fans. Tell me, should I send for Runyon?"

Chad sighed and rose to his feet. "I'm going up to my room and write that damn apology."

Sprague grinned with relief. "Keep it short; you're not running for office."

The next evening, fifteen minutes before game time, Chad stood in the public address system booth, clutching a sheet of paper while the announcer introduced him.

The chorus of Bronx cheers and cat-calls welled up like a gigantic wave and Chad nervously fingered the paper while he waited for it to subside.

He stepped up to the microphone. "I
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would like to apologize to the people in this ball park and to all the other fans of the Falcons for the words I used in reference to them last Monday."

Chad was somewhat surprised at the way his voice boomed through the park. He cleared his throat and continued. "I sincerely regret having said the things I did, and I would like to apologize also to Ed O'Brien of the Lions for what I may have said about him. O'Brien is one of the finest players in the league."

He debated for a second whether he should read the last paragraph and then decided he would. "And at this time, I would like to thank all of you who voted for me in the recent All-Star Poll. I will try to live up to the confidence you have shown in me, and in the future I will try to be a credit to a great game."

As he stepped away from the microphone, the crowd made it known that it had not been appeased. But here and there were small islands of applause.

Down on the field, Chad took a deep breath and went over to the Lion's dug-out. The eyes of the Lion's players were cold as they waited for what he had to say. O'Brien's face was impassive as Chad stood before him.

"I'm sorry, Ed," Chad said. "I lost my temper, and the words turned out bad; I didn't really mean them." he held out his hand.

O'Brien looked at it for half a minute. Then he made the handshake short and turned his back on Chad.

WHEN THE infield crews finished with their rakes, Chad trotted out to his position.

O'Brien, leadoff man for the Lions, crouched his way to first on a walk. He danced off the bag, tantalizing Curtis, the Falcon pitcher, to waste energy on a couple of pegs to first.

Curtis finally completed his abbreviated wind-up, and O'Brien was off with the pitch on a hit and run.

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The batter pulled too much and Chad webbed the grounder neatly. He stepped on second just as O'Brien made the slide.

Chad's legs went out from under him and the ball dribbled a couple of feet out of reach. When Chad recovered the ball, it was too late for a play at first.

O'Brien stood on the bag, grinning. "You got to learn to hold on to the ball if you want to be an All-Star."

Chad returned the grin and went back to his position without comment. The fans rumbled in a confused way.

The runners were sacrificed to second and third. Curtis gave an intentional pass to the next batter to fill the bases, hoping for a double play or a play at the plate. But the runner on third scored on a long fly. The next man up fouled out to the catcher to end the first half with the Lions ahead, 1 to 0.

In the Falcon half, Heald grounded out to short. Chad followed with a liner that the right fielder had to chase down.

Chad made the turn and took off for second. The throw came in late and as Chad lay in the dirt with his toe hooked safe on the bag, O'Brien brought the ball down hard and viciously to his side.

The crowd got to its feet, expectant. Chad looked toward his dugout, but he saw that no one appeared interested. Only Sprague came strolling out of the coaching box to get in a few words.

Chad waited for the burn on his side to ebb and then he motioned for Sprague to forget it. He smiled at O'Brien. "I figure we're even now. Play your position, but don't get cute."

Pomfret rapped out a single that brought Chad home to knot the score and the next two Falcons went down without changing it.

In the fifth, Oberg, the Lion's clean-up hitter, put his muscle into a waist high pitch and sent it over the scoreboard to bring in a runner ahead of him and put the Lions on the long end of the 3 to 1 score.

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POPULAR GUY

Going into the last of the sixth, with two out, Chad had to bob under a high fast one inside. The next pitch was just as far inside, but lower. Chad couldn't manage to get out of the way of that one and took it on the fleshy part of his arm.

As he massaged it, he looked down at the pitcher and then at his own bench. Only Michalak was on the lip of the dugout.

Chad trotted down to first.

Chad had a long lead as the catcher called for a pitchout. He dived head-long back to first. The backstop's throw was low and it got by the first baseman.

Chad leaped to his feet and steamed for second. The first baseman tracked down the short roll and pegged to second. The ball caught Chad between the shoulder blades. He pulled up at second as O'Brien recovered the ball and blinked away the redness that flashed before his eyes.

WHEN HE recovered, Sprague and Michalak were on the diamond heading for second. Sprague's face was beet-red and he seemed about to explode; but instead he restrained Michalak and took Chad aside. "They're laying for you," he said. "I'm taking you out before you get killed."

Chad listened to the ominous rumbling coming from the grandstands with a slight smile on his face. "I'll stay," he said. Then his eyes went to the Falcon dugout where his teammates sat without moving.

Sprague's glance followed his and then he shrugged and walked off the diamond.

The umpires got the game going again. O'Brien, close to the bag for a possible pickoff, spoke sardonically. "You're a real popular guy with your teammates. I notice how much support they give you."

The next Falcon batter lifted a high fly to center for the third out.

The score held until the last of the

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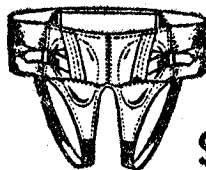
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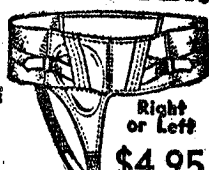
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ninth when Ames, batting for the Falcon pitcher, and Heald put doubles back to back to change it to 3 to 2.

Chad tossed away the leaded bat and stepped into the box. He got the bunt sign and squared off as the pitch came in. It was hard and high, straight for his head. Chad dropped fast to get out of the way. There were shouts of indignation from the fans.

Chad turned to the catcher. "You'd better go out there and tell your boy that I'm tired of going up and down like a yo-yo. If the next one comes even close, I'm going to visit him with a bat in one hand."

The ump decided to take over and called time. He walked out to the mound. The Lion's pitcher grinned while the umpire gave him the warning.

The next two pitches were low, but good, and Chad laid down bunts that dribbled over the foul line.

With the count one and two, Chad took his full cut on the next one. He poled a long one between center and right and it rolled into the far corner. Heald dashed across home to tie the score.

Racing into third, Chad got the go-ahead from Sprague. He lost a fraction of a second when he slipped on the turn, but he righted himself and headed for home.

O'Brien, on the edge of the outfield grass, took the peg from center and snapped the ball toward home plate. The toss came in to the third base side of home plate and caught Chad on the side of the jaw just as he was beginning his slide.

HOT PAIN shot through the side of his face, but he pulled himself together enough to touch home plate for the winning run before the catcher could pounce on the ball.

Chad lay there in the dirt with his eyes closed, listening to the roar of the fans. When he opened his eyes, he found Falcons streaming on the field, some of them to see how much he was

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TEN-STORY SPORTS

hurt and the others making a beeline for second base. Michalak got to O'Brien first and began trading punches. The cops and ushers were having a hard time keeping the angry fans off the field.

The rhubarb lasted for more than ten minutes before order was restored by the umps and some of the more cool-headed players.

After an examination by the trainer, Chad indicated that he felt well enough to walk, but he needed help to get to the club house.

The club doctor spent several minutes examining the jaw. "We'll take X-rays right away, of course," he said. "I don't think anything is broken, but I'm afraid you'll be out for a while."

Chad looked at his teammates gathered around him and he saw in their eyes what he thought he'd never missed before; he was one of them now. Chad found it painful to grin, but he did it anyway. "You'll have to take over my position, Slugger," he said to Michalak. "But don't get too good; I want to be missed."

McGuire edged his way through the players. "Got anything I can print to say about O'Brien?"

Chad kept grinning. "He's a fine player. A real gentleman, and I'd trust him with my sixteen year old sister."

"That last throw that caught you on the jaw. You figure that was an accident?"

Chad found it was just as painful to stop grinning, but he became serious for a moment. "A good throw would have had me at the plate. O'Brien's too much of a team man to throw away a game for any reason."

The locker room attendant pushed his way through. "There's a bunch of people outside who want to know how you are and they want your autograph if you're not hurt too bad. Should I tell them you can't make it?"

"Hell, no!" Chad said. "Somebody hand me a ballpoint; I'll be right out."

